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ABSTRACT

Students at Woodridge Middle School in Peninsula, Ohio, have access to a brand new library which houses more than 10,000 items. This study examined whether students take advantage of the school library and its resources when completing school assignments. A random sample of students in grades six through eight was given a questionnaire to fill out regarding their use of the school library. They were asked how often they visited the school library, reasons why they liked to visit, which library resources they used to complete school assignments, the types of magazines and books they liked to read and where they obtained reading materials. Nearly 80% of the students visited the school library at least once or twice per week and 95% of students used the library to complete school assignments. Students most often visited the library when they went with a class or during their study hall. The most common reasons they went to the library were to work on their homework, read magazines and materials for fun, or work on the library's computers. When working on class assignments, students most often used the library's reference books and encyclopedias on CD-ROM. Lastly, 83% of the students obtained their reading materials from the Woodridge Middle School library, while 80% used their local public library. This study concludes that students are taking advantage of this library and its resources. (Contains 19 references.) (Author)

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STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY: A USAGE STUDY OF WOODRIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARY

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Library Science

by

Kristen D. Oravec

August, 1997

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Master's Research Paper by

Kristen D. Oravec

B.A., Miami University, 1992

M.L.S., Kent State University, 1997

Approved by

Adviser_____ Date _____

Abstract

Students at Woodridge Middle School in Peninsula, OH, have access to a brand new library, which houses more than 10,000 items. Do students take advantage of the school library and its resources when completing school assignments?

A random sample of students in grades six through eight was given a questionnaire to fill out regarding their use of the school library. They were asked how often they visited the school library, reasons why they liked to visit, which library resources they used to complete school assignments, the types of magazines and books they liked to read and where they obtained reading materials.

Nearly 80% of the students visited the school library at least once or twice per week and 95% of students used the library to complete school assignments. Students most often visited the library when they went with a class or during their study hall. The most common reasons they went to the library were to work on their homework, read magazines and materials for fun or work on the library's computers. When working on class assignments, students most often used the library's reference books and encyclopedias on CD ROM. Lastly, 83% of the students obtained their reading materials from the Woodridge Middle School library, while 80% used their local public library. Students are taking advantage of the Woodridge Middle School library and putting its resources to good use.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction/Problem Statement

A school library is vital to the success of a quality education. On the institutional level, school libraries exist to support the school's curriculum and provide resources for learning. At the student level, school libraries may exist to help students conduct research for a term paper, or supply magazines and newspapers for pleasure reading, or simply provide a large table where students can spread out their materials and work on a project. Whatever the reason, a well-funded school library with an adequate collection that is accessible to all sends the message to students that the library is an important part of learning. Jimmy Carter said it best: "If we are to have an educated and informed population, we need a strong and open library system, supported by a committed administration. We cannot call for a revival of quality education in America and close our libraries. We cannot ask our children to learn to read and take away their books" (Carter 1990, 39).

While it is necessary for school districts to keep school libraries open and functioning, it is even more crucial that students come into the library and take advantage of its resources. This study will determine if students use their school library and its materials. Use means students visiting the library regardless of the nature of their visit. It will also look into the specific library resources students use. Resources include books, periodicals, newspapers, computers and non-circulating materials. It will also attempt to answer why students use the school library. Students' reading interests are helpful to ascertain because it gives insight into areas of the

collection that may need to be updated or weeded. If students say they do not rely on school library resources, it will be advantageous to gain insight into why they do not use these resources. Also, much can be accomplished by asking students about ways the school library can improve its resources, facilities and services to meet their needs and enhance the learning process.

The information gleaned from this research will directly impact the library services and resources offered to students at Woodridge Middle School, where this study will be conducted. If the study reveals students are taking full advantage of the library and its resources, the school library staff can continue to provide the same high level of services. If students are not using the library to its full capacity, then library staff can improve services and resources by responding to the concerns highlighted by students.

This study could also impact collection development strategies in the school library. Knowing there is a high demand for certain types of items, librarians can concentrate more resources in those areas. This is not to say, however, that collection development decisions are based solely on what students want to see in the library, but it is important to bear in mind what will appeal to students when ordering new materials. Identifying students' interests can highlight new trends in library service. For example, if students say they would like to see more CD ROMs in the library, perhaps students are more technologically proficient than they have been in the past.

School library staff members can also use this information in long-term planning and justifying expenses to administration and school board members. Providing more money for the purchase of CD ROMs, for example, will be more favorably viewed upon when a librarian tells administration members that students use CD ROMs extensively for instructional purposes. This

study will also highlight areas of instructional weakness. For example, if students say they do not use the school library because they do not know how to use it or are intimidated by it, then maybe the school librarian can teach more library skills courses or provide other types of training. As researchers Jacqueline C. Mancall and M. Carl Drott note: "school library media specialists can have a significant impact in shaping the information-seeking and use patterns of their students. The effect of professional guidance and direction is more important than the availability of resources, the intellectual orientation of the community, or the socio-economic level of the school district" (Mancall and Drott 1983, 125).

The library staff could also integrate more closely the library's services and resources into the school's curriculum so students have more opportunities to use the library and learn how to find materials on their own. And since the school library's main purpose is to support the school's curriculum (Mancall and Drott 1983), this will make the library an even more vital component of the school and serve as a link between students and information.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, students should learn to use the library and its resources at an early age, or they may never take full advantage of libraries. In a study of six high school libraries, Jody B. Charter notes that students who are denied access to school libraries, "may never again choose to enter a library" (Charter 1987, 160). Libraries may lose a whole generation of users, so it is crucial to allow students to use their school library to its fullest extent, which can lead to lifelong patronage of all types of libraries.

Institutional Background

Woodridge Middle School is located in Peninsula, OH. The school serves students ages 11 to 15 in grades six through eight. In September 1996, students entered a brand new school building, which includes a spacious library that is both the physical and academic center of the school. The library is currently in the automation process, converting from a card to online catalog, as well as computerized circulation. Computers are currently available for CD ROM use and word processing. The library consists of approximately 10,000 items, including books, periodicals, newspapers, videos, filmstrips, audio recordings and CD ROMs.

All students have the opportunity to visit the library, whether it is through taking library instruction classes, visiting with classroom teachers to work on a project, searching for books for book reports, or reading the latest issue of *Seventeen* or *Popular Science* during study hall. Although the Woodridge School District includes only one primary, intermediate, middle and high school, each building contains a library staffed with a professional librarian with a Master's degree in library science, as well as a part-time library assistant. Libraries in the school district are well-supported in terms of staff, resources and technology.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

There is not much literature devoted to student use of a school library in both library and education research databases, especially at the middle school level, but a few studies were located which show varying results. Much of the research focuses on instructional uses of the school library and integrating the library into the school's curriculum. To compound the matter, much of this research is at the high school or elementary levels. However, abundant information was located about students' reading interests and habits, including reading preferences analyzed by gender and genre. There is also research about the amount of time students spend reading and where students obtain reading materials.

Few researchers have taken on the task of analyzing student use of a school library, but a few case studies were located. Freda Burks, who looked at student use of high school libraries in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, acknowledges the lack of studies on this topic: "Since 1960 much has been written about instruction in library media center use and several studies have identified program effects on use, but none has described the nature and extent of use of the high school library media center by students until this study" (Burks 1996, 143). Although her study focuses on high schools, her observation speaks to the general lack of research in this area, regardless of grade level.

Burks found there was, "limited use of the high school library media center by students based on lack of time and motivation" (Burks 1996, 149). Although Burks does not specifically quantify "limited use," she does note that most students she surveyed (40.7%) only used the

library when they visited with a class and a teacher and, "more than 22 percent reported using their library media centers only a few times a year" (Burks 1996, 145). Burks also notes the most common reason (76%) students gave for using the school library was for class assignments (Burks 1996). When students used the library's resources while visiting the library, the most commonly used item was the photocopy machine, followed by reference books, tables and nonreference books, respectively (Burks 1996). The main reason students cited for not visiting the school library was lack of time (Burks 1996).

Linda H. Bertland quantified students' use of a suburban middle school library by compiling circulation reports by grade level. She found significant differences in circulation patterns by grade level. For example, Bertland found sixth-grade students accounted for 53% of circulation, seventh-grade students accounted for 14% of circulation (mostly leisure reading) and eighth-grade students accounted for 11% (Bertland 1988). These numbers, of course, do not take into account students who came to the school library and used materials solely in the library, and therefore does not represent the total use of the library's services and resources. Bertland also said that because circulation figures represent relative, rather than absolute, use of a collection, collection development decisions cannot be based solely on quantitative values. She concludes that these values must be paired with curriculum concerns and qualitative evaluation in order to make effective collection development decisions (Bertland 1988).

A study of six high school libraries by Jody B. Charter shows students do not have much access to their school library and its resources. "Students ... ranked accessibility services (the availability and provision of library resources and materials to students) as rarely or never

performed in five of the six schools. Lack of access, both to the center and to its materials, was indicated" (Charter 1987, 158). As was noted in the Burks study, students often only used the school library when they visited with a class (Burks 1996). Therefore, classroom teachers exert enormous influence over student use of the school library. Charter notes many teachers preferred to take classes to the library rather than allowing individual or small-group visits, "an approach that effectively keeps adolescents out of school library media centers" (Charter 1987, 160). Like Burks, Charter also found that students had very little time before, during or after school to visit the school library (Charter 1987).

A few other studies also speak to the notion of students using school libraries. Jacqueline C. Mancall and M. Carl Drott, who conducted a 1979 study supported by the U.S. Office of Education, found 84% of students at 15 high schools said they used their school library when searching for information, although the researchers did not specifically define the phrase "searching for information" (Mancall and Drott 1983). Donald Gallo's study of Connecticut students in grades 4 through 12 found students visited their local public library about the same amount as they visited their school library (48% to 44%) (Gallo 1985). However, Gallo discovered students preferred the local public library to the school library (63% to 25%), "chiefly because of the wider choice of books and magazines available for independent reading" (Gallo 1985, 738). James Herring, in his book *School Librarianship*, states that although many students used the library only when forced to, "school libraries are still used for recreational reading by pupils, with fiction and materials on hobbies and sports being particularly popular" (Herring 1988, 64). These studies, although somewhat contradictory in nature, suggest students used the

school library, but the extent and nature of that use often depended on the individual school library and its staff, as well as the teaching styles of classroom teachers.

The Herring reference is a convenient segue into a discussion of students' reading interests and the role of the school library in supplying reading materials to satisfy these interests. By analyzing students' reading interests and habits, librarians can gain insight into its impact on student use of the school library and if the library is adequately meeting their reading needs. Although some of the following surveys mentioned were conducted at public libraries, the information regarding students' reading interests in itself is not contingent upon the library where the research was conducted. The information is merely a measure of student reading interest and therefore can be helpful to school librarians.

Reading may include reading items for fun, such as popular magazines and paperback fiction, or reading for school assignments. For example, a 1984 survey administered to students at a high school in a small university town revealed 89% of students read for pleasure (Stripling 1985). Likewise, a study of students conducted at two rural high schools in North Carolina showed, "a surprising 296 of our 362 respondents (82%) answered 'yes' to the question, 'Do you ever read in your spare time.'" (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986, 187).

While it is apparent students choose to read for "fun" in their spare time, it is interesting to note reported gender differences in reading as an activity. For example, a survey of student users of a small rural public library in Illinois showed, "as expected more girls than boys read everyday" (Obert 1988, 47). The previously mentioned North Carolina survey also indicated 92%

of females as opposed to 72% of males chose to read in their leisure time (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986).

Because studies show students read in their spare time and more girls than boys read, the next logical step is to determine how often they read. However, the research in this area tends to produce discrepant findings. A 1987 study of middle school students across Ohio concluded each student read 9.8 books per month on average, with males averaging 7.8 books and females 11.8 books (MacLachlan 1987). Stripling's report puts the number much lower, at five books or fewer per *year* for two-thirds of the students surveyed (Stripling 1985). However, Stripling's survey covered students in the higher grades, while MacLachlan's study covered grades five through nine. This probably relates to the relative drop in reading interest as students become older (Stripling 1985). Also as Obert notes in her survey of student users of an Illinois library, "as both the girls and boys get older the number who read everyday or weekly drops" (Obert 1988, 47). Another study of students just entering middle school yields yet another set of conflicting results. The report concluded that while a few students read four to five books per week, the average was just two books per month (Gjengset 1986). Clearly it is difficult to generalize about the frequency of reading among middle school students.

Many researchers have asked students how much time they spend watching television and then compared that number with the amount of time they read. In MacLachlan's Ohio middle school study, he found 64% of males spent more time watching TV than reading, while 66% of females said they spent more time in front of the TV (MacLachlan 1987). One Gallup Survey

asked students to estimate time spent engaged in certain activities. Students reported on an average day they spent 2 hours, 24 minutes watching TV, 2 hours listening to the radio and 1 hour, 48 minutes reading, including newspapers, magazines and books (Wood 1988). Even though students say they read, the numbers indicate they read less than they watch television.

While most studies reveal students are reading in their leisure time, it would be helpful for librarians, teachers and parents to know what types of materials students like to read. For instance, the previously mentioned Gallup Survey, which reported students watched on average 2 hours, 24 minutes of TV per day, also found students spent 1 hour, 6 minutes per day reading books, 24 minutes reading magazines, and 18 minutes reading newspapers (Wood 1988). A study of rural ninth-grade readers divided reading material preferences by gender. For males, 72% listed magazines, 68% chose sports/sports biographies, and 54% said comic books were their favorites (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986). For females, the categories were romance books (90%), mystery books (73%) and magazines (73%) (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986). Overall, the researchers determined magazines were the favorite reading of students, while paperback books ran a close second (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986).

In Margaret Marshall's book, *Libraries and Literature for Teenagers*, she reports the newspaper was the most popular reading material (Marshall 1975). "Statistics show that most young people read at least one newspaper every day ... statistics also show that the newspaper is often that taken by the parents" (Marshall 1975, 135-136). Marshall points out, however, that students mostly looked at a newspaper rather than read it, usually by turning to the comics, horoscope or sports pages (Marshall 1975).

Another area that turns up frequently in the literature is the notion that students prefer paperback books over hardback books. In Barbara Stripling's write-up of a survey she administered to students, she states, "Paperbacks are generally much more popular than hardbacks" (Stripling 1985, 376). Another article reports conflicting results in studies about paperback versus hardback book preferences. "Many studies indicate that children choose paperbacks over hardcovers; others show that the format makes little difference" (Fasick 1985, 22). Finally in Marshall's research, she tends to agree with Stripling's assertions that paperbacks were more popular than hardbacks. She says this was often due to "its cover attraction, its pocket size, its dissimilarity from the school book and its content, which is often only available in paperback" (Marshall 1975, 154). Most of the research says paperbacks are more popular with students, but it is not without its detractors.

Students say they read a variety of formats and they also enjoy reading about a variety of subjects. There have been numerous reports published about what topics interest young readers, whether they are reading magazines or books. Research on magazine preferences often illustrates gender differences in reading interests. For example, MacLachlan's study of Ohio middle school students revealed females read *Teen*, *Teenage*, *Young Miss* and *People*, while males chose *Sports Illustrated* as their favorite, followed by *Boys Life* and *Popular Science* (MacLachlan 1987). Similarly, the study of North Carolina students showed boys preferred *Hot Rod*, *Field and Stream* and *Sports Illustrated*, while girls chose *Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Jet*, *Ebony* and *Young Miss* (Harrell, Privette and Mellon 1986). Another study, published in 1963, shows these magazine reading preferences are nothing new. The study reports 52% of boys chose *Sports Illustrated* as their

favorite magazine, while "love-interest" magazines were preferred by girls (Vaughan 1970). Clearly the gender differences in magazine reading have changed little in more than 30 years.

When it comes to books, students also show some gender differences in what they choose to read. However, the differences are not as pronounced, probably because of the greater variety of book topics from which to choose. In MacLachlan's Ohio middle school study, he found the favorite overall fiction categories were: teenage, adventure, mystery/detective, humorous, and fantasy and ghosts (tied) (MacLachlan 1987). When he analyzed the reading interests according to gender, he discovered boys listed adventure, mystery/detective, football and humorous (tied), baseball and science (tied) and survival, while girls chose teenage, adventure, humorous, mystery/detective and fantasy (MacLachlan 1987). The reading preferences are a little more broad in the nonfiction category. The overall likes were: animals, computers and jokes/riddles (tied), cooking, witchcraft, and swimming. Females said their favorites were animals, cooking, witchcraft, jokes/riddles and horses, while boys favored computers and science experiments (tied), chemistry, animals, baseball and space exploration (tied) and war (MacLachlan 1987).

Adele Fasick, writing in the journal *Emergency Librarian*, displayed results from studies of students' favorite reading subjects. Two of the studies showed mystery and adventure, respectively, as the most popular, while a third study reported funny stories and mysteries as the most popular (Fasick 1985). Also, Fasick points out that one of the studies revealed the subject girls most disliked reading about was war, while boys chose love stories as their least favorite (Fasick 1985). Obert's study of rural Illinois students showed 70-80% of all students liked mystery/adventure stories and both sexes showed interest in sports stories (Obert 1988). Boys

showed more of an interest in science fiction/fantasy, historical fiction and humorous fiction/jokes and riddles, as well as animal books. Romance novels were preferred overwhelmingly by girls (Obert 1988).

A Gallup Survey, published in *Publisher's Weekly*, traced gender differences in fiction and non-fiction genres as it related to book purchases by young adults. Nearly half of the females surveyed, or 44%, said they recently purchased a romance book, while 42% of males said they bought an action/adventure book (Wood 1986). When it came to purchasing nonfiction titles, 39% of boys as opposed to 20% of girls bought a biography. Boys were also much more likely (20%) to buy a history book as opposed to girls (5%), but girls were more likely than boys to purchase health/diet/exercise books (Wood 1986).

It is clear that students have definite likes and dislikes when it comes to reading, but where do they go to find their favorite reading materials? Do they use the school library or some other source, and if so, which source? Dan MacLachlan, in his study of Ohio middle school students, asked them where they find their reading material. The most common answer was the school library, where students checked out an average of 4.6 books per month, followed by 3.1 books per month from the public library and 1.5 books per month purchased and/or borrowed from friends (MacLachlan 1987). A North Carolina study found 90% of students surveyed said, "the primary source of reading material is the school library" (Harrell, Privette, Mellon 1986, 188). Similarly, students in New Ulm, Minnesota reported the school library as the main outlet for reading resources (Ristau 1988). Lastly, students also obtained reading materials at home, which was often provided by parents. A 1991 Book-of-the-Month Club survey found, "91% of

respondents said that books were available in their homes" (*Publisher's Weekly* 1991, 13). Although students reported locating reading materials through many outlets, the high percentage of students who used the school library is encouraging.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

There are several research questions that will be analyzed and answered with the data collected from this study.

Research Objectives

1. This study will determine if the library at Woodridge Middle School is being used by students and if they are satisfied with the library's resources. "Use" includes any time a student comes to the school library, regardless of his or her purpose. Resources are any materials housed in the library, including books, magazines, newspapers and computers, and encompasses both in-library and external use of items.

2. Does use of the school library vary according to grade level?

3. Whatever grade students are in, what time of day do they typically visit the library?

4. Do students like to visit the school library? If they do not like visiting the school library, what reasons do students cite?

5. Are students using the school library and how are they using it? Are they getting assistance from library staff?

6. Are students putting the library's computers to use and if so, for what reasons?

7. What types of formats and book genres to students like to read?

8. Are there gender differences in students' reading preferences for books and magazines?

9. Do students use the school library to check out materials to satisfy their reading interests or do the use another outlet?

Method

Students were asked to complete a brief, self-administered questionnaire during their language arts or library instruction classes, depending upon the students' grade level. Only sixth-graders take a weekly library instruction class at Woodridge Middle School. The school librarian administered questionnaires to sixth-graders during their instruction classes in the school library. Language arts teachers distributed questionnaires to seventh and eighth-graders during their regular language arts class periods. To ensure anonymity, language arts teachers were given an envelope to place returned questionnaires. The teachers did not read the surveys.

The first part of the survey determined how often students visited the school library during a month, the time of day they visited and why they chose to go to the school library. The second section asked about which library materials students used to complete school assignments. On a related theme, the survey asked which non-circulating materials students used in the school library and also which magazines they preferred to read. (Magazines do not circulate at the Woodridge Middle School library.) Students were asked if they checked out Accelerated Reader books from the school library. Accelerated Reader is a school-wide program that requires students to read books assigned a point value, take a test and acquire points that translate into a grade in their language arts class.

Another part of the survey determined if students used the library's computers and which applications they performed, e.g. word processing, games, CD ROMs. Students were asked if they checked out books for fun, what types of formats they liked to read and what genres they

liked to read. Lastly, students were given the opportunity to comment on additional resources they would like to see the school library purchase or about library services in general.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to students during the week of May 5, 1997. Exactly 120 surveys were distributed and 118 (98%) were returned (two students chose not to complete the survey). Of the returned surveys, 108 (92%) were deemed sufficiently completed to be included in the tabulation of results. There were 36 (33%) questionnaires from sixth-graders, 39 (36%) from seventh-graders and 33 (31%) from eighth-graders. Responses from each grade level were analyzed according to gender. Of the 36 surveys returned from the sixth grade, 22 (61%) were completed by females and 14 (39%) by males, the seventh grade set consisted of 20 (51%) females and 19 (49%) males, and 20 (61%) of the eighth-graders were females as opposed to 13 (39%) males. There were a total of 62 (57%) females and 46 (43%) males in all three grades who completed the questionnaire.

The responses to the questions were analyzed in order to provide answers to the research objectives listed in the objectives/methodolgy section. The first objective was to determine if the school library was being used by students and if they were satisfied with its resources. This was the main objective of this study and it will be partially answered through analysis of the data from the other objectives. It will also be discussed in the summary and conclusions section.

Use by Grade Level

The second objective of this study was to ascertain if use of the school library varied according to grade level. First, Table 1 describes the frequency of library use by all the students in this survey. Second, Table 2 shows how many students in each grade level visited the school library one to two times per week and three to four times per week.

Table 1: Frequency of Library Use (All Students)

Frequency of Library Use	Number	Percent (%)
Everyday	16	15%
1-2 times per week	36	33%
3-4 times per week	32	30%
1-2 times per month	7	6%
3 or more times per month	16	15%
Never	1	1%

According to Table 1, 78% (84) of the survey's respondents said they used the school library at least once or twice per week during the month of April, 1997. The responses for using the library one to two times per week and three to four times per week were very closely linked and accounted for 63% (68) of the students.

Table 2: Frequency of Library Use by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Frequency of Lib. Use	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**
1-2 times per week	13	36%	13	33%	10	30%
3-4 times per week	11	31%	12	31%	9	27%

The data across the three grade levels were fairly consistent, as shown in Table 2. A large percentage of students visited the school library at least once or twice per week. This high number may be due to the fact that many students visited the library several times per week for a study hall or a home base, which will be analyzed further in the discussion of the next objective.

Use by Time of Day

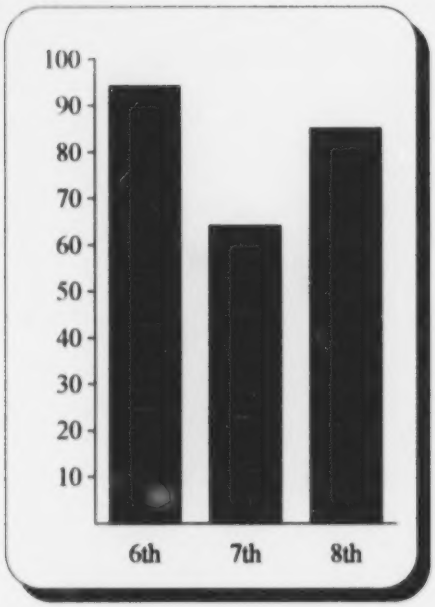
The third objective looked at the time of day students typically used the school library. Table 3 gives statistics for the various times of day students visited the library. Graph 1 shows by grade level the number of students who said they visited the school library during a class.

Table 3: Time of Day Students Used the School Library (All Students)

Time of Day	Number	Percent (%)
Before School	14	13%
After School	11	10%
During Class	87	81%
In Between Classes	29	27%
During Lunch	49	45%
During Study Hall/Home Base	56	52%

As Table 3 shows, students overwhelmingly used the school library during a class visit. The next most common answers were during study hall periods and lunch. Whether students came to the library during class or study hall, teachers made the decisions about allowing students to visit the library. Only during lunch could students choose to go to the library on their own.

Among the different grade levels, the most common answer given was during class, although the percentages varied. As illustrated in graph 1, 94% (34) of sixth-graders said they visited the school library during class. This is probably because all sixth-graders take a required library instruction class once a week, in addition to visiting for other reasons. The number dropped to 64% (25) for seventh-graders who said they came to the library during class, but 85% (28) of eighth-graders visited the library with a class. The second most common answer for all three grade levels was during study hall/home base. Clearly, classroom teachers exerted enormous influence over when students visited the school library. They could also influence student use of the library by encouraging students to visit the school library during a study hall or home base period.



Graph 1: Percentage of students in each grade who visited the school library during class.

Reasons for Use

The next objective was an attempt to get into some of the reasons students liked to use the school library or why they chose not to do so. Table 4 gives the break down for all students and Table 5 displays students' reasons for using the library by grade level. There is also a discussion of some of the reasons students gave for not visiting the school library.

Table 4: Reasons for Using the School Library (All Students)

Reason for Using the Library	Number	Percent (%)
Because it is quiet	49	45%
Work on homework	59	55%
Read magazines/materials for fun	57	53%
Play on computers	54	50%
Spread out materials on a large table	38	35%
Sit with friends	49	45%
Get help from librarians	34	31%
Other	41	38%

The first part of the data, as demonstrated in Table 4, looked at why students liked to use the school library. Students in all three grades closely ranked several of the reasons why they used the library. No one reason stood out as being a favorite, but the top clustered responses were: working on homework, reading magazines and materials for fun and playing on the computers.

Table 5: Reasons for Using the School Library by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Reason for Using the Library	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**
Work on homework	22	61%	15	38%	22	67%
Play on computers	22	61%	18	46%	14	42%
Read mags./mats. for fun	18	50%	16	41%	23	70%
Spread out materials	13	36%	14	36%	11	33%
Get help from librarians	14	39%	10	26%	10	30%
It is quiet	14	39%	16	41%	19	58%
Sit with friends	17	47%	10	26%	22	67%
Other	16	44%	17	44%	8	24%

According to Table 5, the answers tended to vary when analyzed according to grade level. Many students liked the quiet and relaxed atmosphere of the school library, where they could work on their homework or read quietly. Many students, except eighth-graders, also liked to use the computers because not all classrooms have computers and also because students were allowed to play CD ROM games during study halls and home base periods.

Students were also asked why they did not like to visit the school library. Very few students checked any responses in this category, but of those who did, the most common answer (21%) (23) was they had trouble locating items in the library. This was followed by the library did

not have the materials they needed (9%) (10), other reasons (8%) (9), because the library was quiet (7%) (8), and only 3% (3) said because they did not receive the help they needed. Although only 21% of all survey respondents said they had trouble locating materials, this may be a weakness in library services.

Use for School Assignments

The fifth objective asked if students used the school library to complete school assignments. It also attempted to identify which library resources students used to complete assignments, as illustrated in Tables 6 and 7. The last part of this section deals with reasons students gave for not using the school library to complete assignments and is shown in Table 8.

A resounding 95% (103) of the respondents said they used the school library when working on school assignments. These numbers were fairly consistent among the three grade levels. 97% (35) of sixth-graders used the library, 90% (35) of seventh-graders said yes to using the library, and 100% (33) of eighth-graders used the school library.

Table 6: Library Resources Used to Complete School Assignments (All Students)

Type of Library Resource	Number	Percent (%)
Encyclopedias on CD ROM	80	74%
Fiction Books	16	15%
Magazines	40	37%
Newspapers	28	26%
Non-fiction Books	62	57%
Reference Books	99	92%

Table 6 shows the answers were evenly distributed as to the types of library resources students used to complete school assignments. By far the most popular resource was reference books, followed by encyclopedias on CD ROM, which could be considered a type of reference resource. The closest resource to reference materials was non-fiction books and the other three types of resources - fiction books, magazines and newspapers - were grouped at the bottom.

Table 7: Library Resources Used to Complete School Assignments by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Type of Library Resource	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**
Reference Books	32	89%	35	90%	32	97%
Encyl. on CD ROM	25	69%	29	74%	26	79%

These answers were consistent among the grade levels, as Table 7 indicates. Clearly, students preferred to use reference books, resources they could not obtain anywhere else in the school. Also, CD ROMs were a popular resource, partly because they were new to the library during the 1996-97 school year and also because it was the first time many students had a chance to use an encyclopedia on CD ROM.

Another library resource students used to complete school assignments was Accelerated Reader books. Of the total number of students who responded to the questionnaire, 77% (83) said they checked out Accelerated Reader books from the school library. The numbers were fairly

consistent across the grade levels: 72% (26) of sixth-graders, 72% (28) of seventh-graders and 88% (29) of eighth-graders checked out Accelerated Reader books. However, the numbers were a little more unbalanced when they were analyzed according to gender. Females (85%) (53) in this study were more likely than males (65%) (30) to check out Accelerated Reader books. Perhaps this is because more girls (60%) (37) as opposed to just 43% (20) of males said they enjoyed reading magazines and materials for fun and females may have considered reading Accelerated Reader books fun. Also, 63% (39) of females said they checked out books for fun, while only 50% (23) of males said they checked out books for fun. Females may have included Accelerated Reader books among these "fun" books that they checked out of the library.

Table 8: Reasons for Not Using the Library for School Assignments (All Students)

Reason for not using the school library	Number	Percent (%)
Does not have materials	7	6%
Prefer to use public library	10	9%
Do not need school library	5	5%
Do not have time to use library	9	8%
Do not get help	2	2%
Other	2	2%

Only a small group of students checked responses to the question about why they did not use the school library to complete their school assignments. Students mostly preferred to use the public library or did not have time to use the school library. The responses varied according to grade level. For example, 11% (4) of sixth-graders said they preferred to use the public library,

while seventh-graders tied (13%) (5) with they preferred the public library and did not have time to use the school library. Nine percent (3) of eighth-graders said the library did not have the materials they wanted to meet their needs. Many of these answers were not mutually exclusive. For example, students may have preferred to use their local public library because they felt it had more materials or because they did not have the time to use the school library during the day.

Use of Library Computers

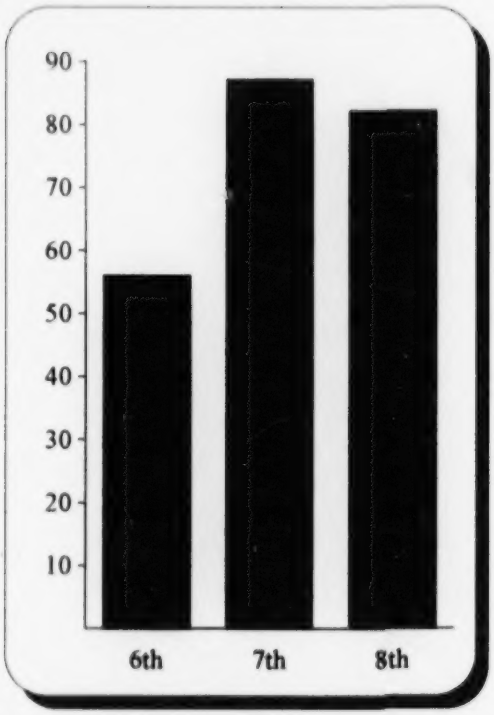
The sixth objective was tied closely to the fifth objective in that it delved into student use of another library resource: computers. This section looks at how many students used the library's computers and which programs and applications they used. Graph 2 shows the number of students by grade level who used encyclopedias on CD ROM.

Almost all the students (90%) (97) who participated in the survey said they used the school library's computers at some time during April, 1997. The numbers were fairly equal across the three grade levels - 86% (31) of sixth-graders, 92% (36) of seventh-graders and 91% (30) of eighth-graders - but there was a slight difference between the number of females and males who used the computers. Eighty-seven percent (54) of females made use of the computers, while 93% (43) of males did, a slight, but noticeable difference. The reason for this gender difference is unclear, although the reasons students used the computer may help clarify this issue. These gender disparities will be analyzed at the end of this section.

The most common reason (75%) (81) students used the school library's computers was to search for information on CD ROM encyclopedias. Games were used by 60% (65) of the

respondents and only 25% (27) took advantage of word processing software. However, the data were somewhat divergent between sixth-grade students and students in the other two grades. Sixth-grade students most often cited (81%) (29) games as the item they chose to use on the computer, and only 56% (20) said they took advantage of the encyclopedias on CD ROM. Conversely, 87% (34) of seventh-graders and 82% (27) of eighth-graders searched the encyclopedias on CD ROM, while only 54% (21) of seventh-graders and 45% (15) of eighth-graders opted to play games on the computer (see graph 2). Sixth-grade students were not as heavily involved in research for school projects, whereas seventh- and eighth-grade students were expected to find information on their own for many of their class assignments.

Another trend that emerged in the data was that more males than females said they played games on the computers; 70% (32) of males as opposed to just 53% (33) of females. Since more males opted to play computer games in their free time, this may explain why more males said they used the school library's computers. Many games are targeted toward males, as were video games before them. These games often depict war, violence and killing, subjects that, traditionally speaking, do not usually appeal to females.



Graph 2: Percentage of students in each grade who used encyclopedias on CD ROM.

Reading Habits

This objective examined the types of formats students liked to read. Students ranked the formats they preferred to read, as shown in Table 9, and their choices are analyzed according to grade level (Table 10). This section also looks at the number of males and females who opted for paperback books and magazines (Graph 3).

Table 9: Type of Format Students Liked to Read (All Students)

Format	Number	Percent (%)
Comic books	17	16%
Hardback books	71	66%
Magazines	87	81%
Newspapers	21	19%
Paperback books	84	78%

Although students rated magazines as the most popular type of format to read (as shown in Table 9), paperback books ran a close second and hardback books were not far behind.

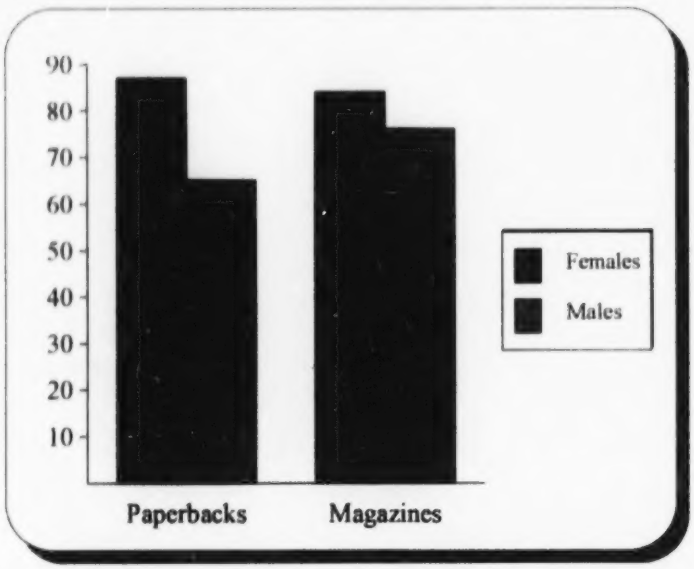
Table 10: Type of Format Students Liked to Read by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Format	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Hardbacks	25	69%	21	54%	25	76%
Magazines	28	78%	29	74%	30	91%
Paperbacks	27	75%	32	82%	25	76%

These results were somewhat consistent throughout the grade levels. Magazines and paperbacks were fairly close in both the sixth and seventh grades, but eighth-graders were tied between paperback and hardback books. However, the most consistently low statistic was for hardback books. There were also a few gender differences at play in these numbers. According to graph 3, while most females (87%) (54) said they liked paperback books and another 84% (52) chose magazines, 76% (35) of males opted for magazines and only 65% (30) said they read

paperback books. Magazines and paperback books were very closely placed as the most common answers, while hardback books were not far behind in third place.

Paperback books are often seen as "shorter" and easier to carry, and may have appealing covers that attract more readers. Also, Margaret Marshall pointed out in her 1975 book, *Libraries and Literature for Teenagers*, that paperback books are different from traditional school textbooks and may serve as a break from "regular" schoolwork.



Graph 3: Percentage of males and females who read paperback books and magazines.

Gender Differences

The next objective asked if there were differences among the genders about the magazines and book genres they preferred to read. Table 11 shows how all students voted for a variety of

magazines. There is also a discussion of the magazines females and males preferred, which is illustrated in Table 12. This section also looks at students' favorite book genres and is demonstrated in Table 13 for all students and in Table 14 by grade level.

Table 11: Favorite Magazines Students Liked to Read (All Students)

Magazine	Number	Percent (%)
American Girl	16	15%
Automobile	9	8%
Dog Fancy	6	6%
Ebony	2	2%
Entertainment Weekly	10	9%
Nickelodeon	21	19%
Nintendo Power	11	10%
Popular Science	15	14%
Seventeen	59	55%
Sports Illustrated	43	40%
Time	12	11%
YM	48	44%
Other	46	43%

Research has shown that females and males displayed differences when it came to the type of magazines and books they preferred to read. The results of this study support this earlier research. Although Table 11 shows the favorite magazines of all students, the top two vote-getters were "female" magazines - *Seventeen* and *YM*. This was probably influenced by the higher number of females who participated in this study. *Sports Illustrated* was also rated highly, mostly because nearly three-fourths of the males in this study voted for it.

The magazines seemed to fall almost entirely into gender categories. For example, the top three female responses were: 87% (54) for *Seventeen*, 73% (45) for *YM* and 47% (29) for other titles, which mainly included *Teen* magazine. The highest ranked answers for males were: 72% (33) for *Sports Illustrated*, 37% (17) for other titles, which included sports, science and computer magazines, and 30% (14) for *Popular Science*. The choices for females were consistent throughout the three grade levels, but the magazines males chose were slightly varied.

Table 12: Favorite Magazines Males Liked to Read by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Magazine	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**	**Number**	**Percent (%)**
Nickelodeon	4	29%	3	16%	0	0%
Nintendo Power	4	29%	5	26%	1	8%
Other	3	21%	8	42%	6	46%
Popular Science	2	14%	7	37%	5	38%
Sports Illustrated	11	79%	17	89%	5	38%

While females overwhelmingly chose teenage/fashion magazines as their favorites, Table 12 suggests that males split up their choices among sports, computer and science magazines. Males seemed to display a wider range of interests when choosing magazines, especially as they reached the higher grade levels.

Table 13: Favorite Book Genres Students Liked to Read (All Students)

Book Genre	Number	Percent (%)
Adventure	71	66%
Biography	15	14%
Fantasy	41	38%
History	24	22%
Humorous	69	64%
Mystery	75	69%
Poetry	24	22%
Romance	32	30%
Science	16	15%
Science Fiction	26	24%
Sports	36	33%
Other	18	17%

According to Table 13, there was no clear favorite in the category of type of books students liked to read. Mystery, adventure and humorous books were closely placed at the top of this list. In fact, these three genres tended to go up and down in the placement among the different grade levels.

Table 14: Favorite Book Genres Students Liked to Read by Grade Level

	6th grade		7th grade		8th grade	
Book Genre	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Adventure	24	67%	27	69%	20	61%
Humorous	21	58%	29	74%	19	58%
Mystery	29	81%	26	67%	20	61%

Table 14 indicates that there was no clear favorite among the grade levels. While mysteries were popular with both sixth- and eighth-graders, seventh-graders chose humorous titles as their favorite, which was rated the lowest by the other two grades. However, even eighth-graders were split, choosing both adventure and mysteries as their favorite, suggesting that there was no run-away choice for favorite genre.

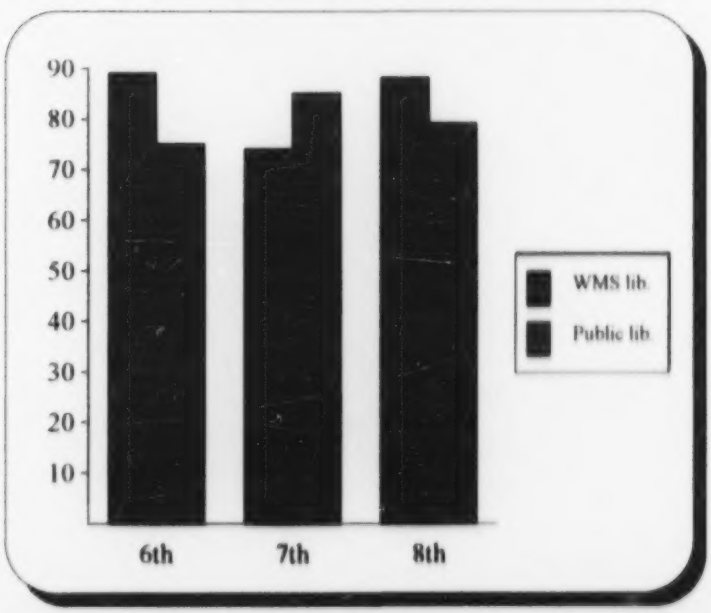
There were some slight gender disparities in the types of books students liked to read. Seventy-seven percent (48) of females chose mystery as their favorite, followed by 63% (39) with humorous, 60% (37) for adventure and 47% (29) percent with romance titles. Seventy-four percent (34) of males opted for adventure stories, 65% (30) liked to read humorous books, 59% (27) chose mysteries and 54% (25) opted for sports stories. For the most part, adventure, humorous and mystery books seemed to be the preferred titles, but females were more likely to choose romance stories and males more often opted for sports and science fiction books.

Outlets for Reading Materials

The ninth objective concerned the outlets where students obtained their reading materials. This section gives numerical results for all students and by grade level. Also, Graph 4 shows by grade level how many students used the school library versus their local public library to locate materials.

Eighty-three percent (90) of the respondents obtained their materials from the Woodridge Middle School library, 80% (86) chose to use their local public library, 63% (68) used materials they had at home, 61% (66) purchased materials at a bookstore or other type of store, 39% (42)

obtained materials from their friends and 30% (32) used a classroom library. The Woodridge Middle School library and local public library were very close in the results, as is evident in the numbers among the three grades illustrated on graph 4. For example, 89% (32) of sixth-graders used the Woodridge Middle School library as opposed to 75% (27) who used their local public library. However, 85% (33) of seventh-graders chose to use their local public library, while 74% (29) used the Woodridge Middle School library. Finally, 88% (29) of eighth-grade students used the Woodridge Middle School library and 79% (26) used their local public library. Although slightly more students said they used the Woodridge Middle School library than used their local public library, the numbers were very close. The places most commonly used after these two choices were their home and a bookstore.



Graph 4: Percentage of students in each grade who used the Woodridge Middle School library and their local public library to obtain reading materials.

Opinions of the Library

Students made numerous comments about the library and new materials and resources they would like to see the library purchase. Here are a sampling of them:

Comments about the library and its services and resources in general:

"I like to come to the library because it's quiet and I can get my work done."
"I like how well the library is kept. It is very nice!"
"It's fun to go to and it's good to get information."
"You have a lot of good reference books."
"I think you have most of the books you need."
"Sometimes it doesn't have the materials I want."
"It usually can become loud in the library when people are trying to study and complete assignments."
"I think that it's a great place and so are the people in it."
"I enjoy the service and help that I have received."
"It is a beautiful facility and you people are taking good care of it!"
"Some items are old and outdated."
"I think the school library is cool."
"The library is a nice tool and resource."
"I like it a lot. It is a good place to go if you just want to relax."
"It doesn't have that much stuff."
"I think it is better than most school libraries."
"I like how they have computers now. It helps out a lot when you are in class and you need to look something up."
"I like both the librarians. They're both very helpful."
"It's the best library in the school system."
"I like to help in the library."
"The same people are always at the computers and I can hardly ever use them."
"I think that it is a wonderful environment to do work."

Ideas and suggestions for new materials the library could purchase:

A color cartridge for the printer.
More software.
More reference and humorous books.
Bean bags.
Pop machine, the Internet (AOL), reading chairs (Lazyboys), cubicles for students, computer card catalog and copy machine.
More paperback books and more R.L. Stine.
"I would like to see a purchase of more recent encyclopedias and newer books."
Stephen King, Dean Koontz and Robin Cook books.
"I think you should buy more Accelerated Reader books."

Internet access and more CD ROM titles.
A larger selection of magazines such as *Business Weekly*.
"I would like to see newer encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc. and get rid of the really old books (1950s-1960s)."
Bookmarks, pencils, pens and paper.
"I would like to see the library purchase the *Star Wars* trilogy."
More books on careers.
More recent books on science and other materials that classes use.
The Internet for the computers, newer paperbacks, Christopher Pike books and more science books.
More books that are new and on nature.
More magazines and computer games.
The Internet and "that computer thing that goes through newspapers of the past and present."
More books for older adults.
More paperbacks by Lurlene McDaniel and lots more mysteries, especially by R.L. Stine.

For the most part, these comments were positive and intended with a genuine interest in improving the library. The students seemed to be pleased with the library, its services and its resources. However, the few negative comments seemed to focus on a lack of materials and the frustration with old and out-of-date materials, especially in the sciences. Many of the students' suggestions related to this. Also, many students wanted to use the Internet and other computer resources, suggesting that these materials would be worthwhile purchases.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and conclusions

The first objective of this study was to determine if students used the Woodridge Middle School library and if they were satisfied with its resources and services. Based on the results of this study, students used the school library on a fairly regular basis. Nearly 80% (84) of the students visited the library at least once or twice a week during the month of April, 1997. The results for objective number two indicated the responses were fairly equal across the grade levels, suggesting that there was not a drop in student use of the school library as students moved through the grade levels. These results contradict research performed by Freda Burks (1996) and Jody Charter (1987), who said students did not use the school library on a regular basis. This study's results also differ from Linda Bertland's 1988 study that found that circulation statistics fell significantly as students became older.

Both Burks and Charter agreed that many students only used the school library when they visited with a class. Although visiting with a class was the most common answer in this study, too, students said they liked to visit the school library during their study halls and home base periods to do their homework and read magazines and materials for fun (objectives three and four). Burks and Charter said the most common reason students gave for not visiting the school library was lack of time. In this study, as directed by the fourth objective, students said they preferred to use their local public library or that they did not have time to use the school library.

Relating to objective number five, almost all students in this study, 95% (103), said they

used the school library to complete their school assignments. Students preferred to use reference books, encyclopedias on CD ROM and non-fiction books to complete their assignments. This is consistent with the Burks study, which found that students used reference and nonreference books on a fairly frequent basis. Students indicated they were reasonably happy with the service they received from school library staff when using the library for schoolwork. Only 2% (2) of all students said they did not get the help they needed from school library staff members. Finally, according to objective number six, the statistics showed that students used the library's computers for their schoolwork, mostly to search for information on encyclopedias on CD ROM. It is apparent that students are taking advantage of resources only available in the school library to finish their assignments.

Research objective number seven referred to the types of formats students liked to read. A study by Harrell, Privette and Mellon (1986) found that magazines were the most popular type of reading material, followed by paperback books. Stripling's (1985) research found that paperback books were more popular than hardback books. The same held true in this study, with magazines the most popular reading material, paperbacks second and hardbacks third. However, in some grades, students placed paperback and hardback books close together.

The research about gender differences in preferred magazine titles also held true in this study, which was one of the aims of research objective number eight. Studies by MacLachlan (1987), Vaughan (1970) and Harrell, Privette and Mellon (1986) all discovered that females preferred such magazines as *Teen*, *Seventeen* and *YM*, while males chose *Popular Science* and *Sports Illustrated*. This study revealed the same results, with females overwhelmingly choosing

teenage/fashion magazines and males splitting their votes among sports, computer and science magazines.

Additional results compiled for research objective number eight, which also concerned students' book interests, were just as consistent with the previous research about students' reading interests. Studies by MacLachlan (1987), Obert (1988) and Fasick (1985) all reported that adventure, mystery and humorous books were the most popular reading choices of students. Their research also reported that females more often chose romance stories, while males preferred sports stories. This study displayed nearly similar results, and although sixth- seventh- and eighth-graders ranked these genres in different orders, adventure, mystery and humorous titles were always the top three choices.

Finally, previous studies about where students obtained their reading materials were pretty closely replicated in this study, as directed by research objective number nine. Research by MacLachlan (1987), Ristau (1988) and Harrell, Privette and Mellon (1986) all found that the school library was the most common outlet for students' reading materials. This study also ascertained that the school library was the most common source for reading materials, but the local public library ran a close second.

This study determined that students used the Woodridge Middle School library on a fairly frequent basis. This may be due to the library instruction class all students are required to take during the sixth grade. This helps to orient students to the library and its resources and helps students feel more comfortable in using the library's resources.

Students' frequent use of the school library may also be due to the willingness of classroom teachers to take their classes to the school library to research projects. It is extremely important for school library staff to develop positive working relationships with teachers and show them how the school library can support their curriculums. Librarians and teachers can also develop methods of integrating library resources directly into lessons, such as installing a science lesson on CD ROM on the library's computers or finding current events articles in newspapers and magazines housed in the library. School librarians must make the school library accessible and open to teachers so they will feel comfortable in bringing their students, which will send the message to students that the school library is a valued research tool.

When students came to the library with their classes, many of them used the reference resources when working on class assignments. However, some students said there was a need for more current reference items and other materials, especially in the sciences. These are areas that could be updated and weeded in order to provide the most current and up-to-date resources possible. Another area students commented upon was a need for the Internet, CD ROMs and software. These materials could supplement reference materials and provide more current information on topics that change rapidly.

While students said they would like to see the library purchase these newer materials, some students also indicated they had trouble locating materials for their assignments. This area could be addressed by a more intensive library instruction course, more one-on-one library instruction or library lessons classroom teachers could teach their classes. Library staff should be available throughout the day to provide assistance to those students requiring it. If this weakness

in library instruction could be improved, more students could take advantage of the school library's resources.

It is hard to quantify if students are truly satisfied with the school library, its resources and services, but many of the students' comments indicate they possessed a high level of satisfaction. The fact that so many students used the school library regularly and said they liked to use its resources is encouraging. By keeping the library accessible to students, as well as to teachers, library staff can help students become lifelong learners and library users. By constantly improving and updating resources and materials, library staff can continue to meet the demands of students who are more technologically proficient than they have been in the past. The important thing is to keep striding to make improvements in order to ensure students feel comfortable in using the school library, and all types of libraries, for many years to come.

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